

Marketing With Postcards

The absolute best campaign you can create is a letter campaign. A series of personalized letters sent over time can be your most effective selling tool, ever. But man, they're a lot of work.

So the problem is: how can you stay in your customers' Top-of-Mind-Awareness without all that work. The answer is: with a few post cards. By mailing post cards to each prospect or customer every three to eight weeks, your customers and prospects think of you when they need something, and pick up the phone and call you when they're ready to buy.

Post cards are hard working marketing tools because...

They're cheap to produce.

Since a post card is usually a single sheet of paper, it's always cheaper than sending a letter and a brochure stuffed into an envelope. Post cards also incur no letter shop charges of folding and inserting: just image a name and address on one side and away they go.

The postage is cheaper, too.

They're cheap to mail first class: just 21¢ each. This cost is before any postal discounts, which can be substantial! Strangely enough, post cards can be cheaper to mail FIRST CLASS than bulk. Restrictions apply - they must be bar-coded and carrier-route labeled, which is done routinely if you use a letter shop to sort and mail.

Need fast delivery of your message?

Mailing post cards allows you to take advantage of first class delivery while enjoying the postage savings from the first class letter rate.

Postal savings even when mailing just a few cards.

Is your mailing list just to a few hundred special people? Even when just mailing a few handfuls, post cards under 4-1/4" x 6" have a lower postage rate than first class letters: 21¢ - even without any discounts.

Mailing house costs can be completely offset by postage savings.

Tired of doing it yourself? If you take your post cards to a mailing house, their entire cost of inkjet addressing, tying, bagging and delivering to the post office may still cost you less than if you mailed them yourself. It's like getting their service for FREE. You save money because their payment is recovered from all of the postal discounts they get for you. It's a win-win-win: you have less work, save money, and you get better delivery.

Post cards have high readership.

Almost everyone reads post cards, even the good folks who throw out all your bulk direct mail! Heck, all the wording is... right there! By the time your customers have it in their hands... they're reading it.

They're diverse.

Post cards can be looked at as a piece of one-to-one communication - so you can be as personable as "jest settin' on your front stoop," or as formal as a bound book with an embossed gold leaf cover.

Post cards can come back to haunt you.

Double post cards are great as a response vehicle. Many double post cards test profitably against long-copy packages on subscription offers, especially where the magazine is well known. As a bonus, since the address side already contains the customer name, along with any marketing data you'd like to see, it's possible to use that card as a pre-filled-out order card the customer just drops in the mail.

Post cards handle illustrations well.

Line art, airbrush, four color - even crayon... whatever you have, it can look great on a post card. Better paper stock enhances the "It didn't come out as good as we thought it would!" designs.

They're inexpensive to print - no need to go four color.

A nice thing about post cards - one or two color post cards work just fine, and they're cheaper to print. About 90% of the post cards I create for clients are specified to be printed in just one or two colors.

They're easy to handle.

Doing the mailing yourself? No stuffing, no folding.

Not much messing around - just print, address, and mail.

Need to get undeliverable names and addresses mailed back so you can remove them from your mailing list?

Need to make address corrections in a timely fashion without additional expense? Send post cards first class with the imprint "Address Service Requested" below the stamp: the post office will return cards with undeliverable addresses back to you. Lots of catalog companies do this before mailing their catalog - it's much cheaper to get cards back for free than to pay for getting wrecked and unusable catalogs back after the rough handling by the postal service.

Need a quick survey response?

Keep post card surveys short, and ask recipients to fax them back. There's a good chance you'll get lots of them returned.

Additional Recommendations

There are three hard and fast recommendations for post cards. First, don't use cheap paper. Since post cards are usually small sheets, go for the good stuff. In short runs paper stock is a small fraction of the overall costs. I never recommend cheap paper for anything but the cheapest promotions from my cheapest clients, and sometimes for longer press runs of 25,000 sheets and up - where paper cost is a much larger percentage of the overall campaign costs.

Second, don't go for gloss unless you are printing in four colors. A glossy finish will get marked, mangled and scarred at the post office - gloss cards aren't handled well by the post office automatics. Chances are your glossy post card will be delivered with the equivalent of an 18 wheeler tractor trailer skid mark across the billboard side, and hard telling what the address side will look like. The paper stock I recommend? A crisp, bright-white 80 pound linen stock.

Third, don't go for the smallest size card - like the standard card the post office offers. The minimum size card doesn't scream out for attention like a 5-1/2" x 8-1/2" card does, which is the size I recommend. The largest size you can mail without incurring additional expense (over 20¢) is 4-1/4" x 6". The largest post card size you can mail for first class letter postage of 34¢ is an 8-1/2" x 11" sheet. If you can't make an impression with that size, call me and let's talk.

Examples of successful campaigns

An insurance client of mine needed a post card that would be retained by the customer, or at least until their present insurance expires (their ex-date). Theory was: then they'd have the card on-hand and would call him for a quote. We created a 3-fold (21" x 5-1/2" folded to 7" x 5-1/2") card printed in bright yellow and black with the words "SEND HELP" on one side, and with a "what to do in case of an accident" report form on the back. His first run was 10,000. Results: 3 more runs of 10,000 each over the next 6 months. Everyone loved them. They're in everyone's glove compartment. We said "save this card" on each and everyone did. We also printed "Call us for fast friendly information or a quick quote on rates," and everyone did that, too.

An interim placement specialist in the financial community sends post cards every 4 to 6 weeks to his client list. His objective: Top-of-Mind Awareness. Four years ago when we started he had a mailing list of 250. Now he mails to over 1,200 a month. We're on his 31st card (we repeated our favorites over several mailings). Whenever he speaks with clients they always mention they enjoy his cards. The copy on one of my favorite cards: "When your loan manager goes on leave does your customer service follow suit?" He's famous in his industry for his post cards.

Creating successful cards is easy:

On the billboard side: as you would for any advertisement, design for 3 levels of readership: 1. a big bold headline to entice scanning readers. This copy is for folks who just glance at your card to get the idea. If you stop them with a

clever headline, they'll continue reading. Your headline has one objective: drive the reader into the rest of the copy.

2. Subheads are then written and designed to intrigue and arouse the reader further. This is the "not quite as large as the headline type, and not quite as small as the body copy type" line that encourages the smooth transition between the two areas. This line also has the same objective as the headline: get them to read further.

3. The first line or two of the body copy must be smart and sharp - written and designed from the getgo to fulfill the specific objective of... keeping the reader reading. The complete transition of a scanning reader to a confirmed reader still hasn't taken place yet.

After the first few clever lines in your body copy, the reader is then hooked: he's made a commitment to read the rest. Now you can start selling your post card objective whether it is to 1. generate an inquiry via phone by having readers call for further information, 2. generate an order directly from the card, 3. get them to come into your retail store, or 4. send (write or fax) for more information. Don't forget to tell the reader exactly what you want him to do, and be specific.

Additional Tips:

At the bottom of the post card your logo may be the same size but certainly no larger than your telephone number, which should be big enough to see clearly if the card is laying on a desk and a cataract patient is trying to dial your number while standing there with a phone in one hand.

Always print "Save this card!" somewhere near the top, and people will. It's funny - if you don't print this line, they won't.

It's OK to send a card more than once. Successful cards can be sent forever as long as they continue to cover their costs. Unsuccessful cards or cards tougher to track can still be sent regularly. You get sick of looking at them long before your customers get tired of receiving them. If any customers complain, hey - you're getting noticed.

Traditional post cards - those small manila cards you can buy at the post office - may be used for technical, reference-only mailings to engineers and computer geeks. If you want a reference-looking card almost like the one the government would put out notifying you of a tax lien, this is the one. "Now shipping version 4.3" doesn't necessarily need to be in full color.

Also, if your sole intention is to notify a broad customer base of a technology change or B2B product (perhaps as unglamorous as your launch of a new ball bearing, or other necessary product information) as cheaply as possible, the standard manila cards the post office issues will work here, too. But if you're selling something the least bit upscale, or want to command attention, use a larger card of better quality paper.

Double post cards are good for feedback. Besides the larger area for image and copy, you can get an easy-to-use response vehicle in the same piece of mail. This format of cards are great and tests well for well-known and re-up magazine and newsletter subscriptions. They also are good for purging your database of old names and bad addresses, and for asking recipients for recommendations for new names and gathering addresses for mailing and email lists.

Getting your card back

While double post cards are the norm, if you're not die-cutting one side for the address to show through, it's always a problem figuring out which side to address, which is the billboard side, and which side to address to get it back to you.

There are a few alternatives: first, consider a triple post card: three cards scored and folded over to the size of one card. For the little extra it costs for the small square of paper and the extra fold, you get a third more selling space, and it's cheaper than a diecut. It's also much easier to design a dedicated return card that doesn't have to double as something else.

Alternatively, you can leave the return address side with an address grid the recipient fills out before sending back. If your computer printer can print a name and address upside down - you can print the recipient's name and address and/or any priority or special coding in the upper right-hand corner of the return card above the address grid. This is above the fold. Below the fold is the address side to whom you are sending the card. This eliminates inkjetting on the second (back) side of the card in a separate inkjet pass. It's an exceptionally easy-to-use return-card format.

With a single card you can have recipients fill out a few questions in a survey, then fax the whole card back to you.

Bring in some visual recognition

When creating a multi-card campaign, keep the image and the message the same on the address side of each succeeding card. It's usually institutional copy anyhow on this side - name, address, phone, blah blah blah. The address side is also a good place for a few bold lines or a free offer to the reader to get more information: "Call now to get our free booklet about ____."

Don't forget - a post card campaign is not a single mailing, a campaign by definition is a sustained effort over time, so mail frequently. And above all: it's direct mail and a game of numbers - mail as many cards to as many people as you can.